

COINS

Zincs: Now you see 'em, now you don't

By Roger Boye

This week's column answers some of the most often-asked questions about the new copper-coated zinc pennies.

Q—Since early February, we've received several 1982-D cents in change. Are any of them zinc Lincolns?—A. R., Kankakee

A—No. Until next October, machines at the

Denver Mint will churn out the traditional nearly all-copper cents only, according to updated reports from Uncle Sam. Likewise, the Philadelphia Mint won't switch to production of copper-plated zinc pennies until early autumn.

But government factories in San Francisco and West Point, N.Y., already are making millions of zinc cents, many of which are turning up in the circulation. Pennies manufactured in those two cities, as well as in Philadelphia, carry no mint mark. A "D" signifies Denver.

Q—How can I tell if my 1982 no-mint-mark cents have a zinc core or are the older-style copper coins?—S. T., Chicago

A—Some collectors insist that zinc cents have a flatter-sounding ring when dropped. But you should use a sensitive scale for a definitive answer because zinc pennies weigh about one-half gram less than the nearly all-copper cents, a difference of about 20 percent.

You would also know for sure if you scratch the surface of a copper-coated zinc penny with a pin and expose the bright core. But such a test would destroy the coin's beauty, of course.

Q—Since the government will make two types of cents during this changeover year, do you think either type will become rare in the foreseeable future?—J. D., Evanston

A—No. Uncle Sam will produce nearly 4 billion

zinc cents during 1982, as well as about 8 billion of the nearly all-copper variety, according to experts' estimates. That's plenty to satisfy collector demand well into the next century.

Q—Will any copper cents be made in 1983? If not, do you recommend saving quantities of copper cents?—A. N., Chicago Heights

A—Once the switch is made later this year at Denver and Philadelphia, production of the nearly all-copper cents may end forever.

But I do not recommend hoarding. At current prices, the metal in a nearly all-copper Lincoln cent is worth less than a half-cent. More than 100 billion copper Lincolns are in circulation, enough to stretch halfway to the moon if placed in a single stack.